

## **HIGHWAYS OF STATEWIDE SIGNIFICANCE (HSS) UPDATE**

### **BRIEFING PAPER**

Prepared for the  
October 2003 Transportation Commission meeting

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### **PURPOSE:**

Inform the Transportation Commission on Legislative Transportation Committee (LTC) actions and Regional Transportation Planning Organizations (RTPO) concerns affecting the Highways of Statewide Significance (HSS) update process.

### **BACKGROUND:**

In August, the Commission directed WSDOT to implement a planning process to update the HSS system in accordance with the Legislative requirement that the Commission review the system every five years. The process asks RTPOs to nominate routes for addition to or deletion from the HSS list. The Commission will evaluate the RTPO nominations based on the following criteria and make a recommendation to the Legislature:

This statewide system shall include at a minimum interstate highways and other statewide principal arterials that are needed to connect major communities across the state and support the state's economy. (RCW 47.05.021(3)) (emphasis added)

[and]

The legislature declares the following transportation facilities and services to be of statewide significance: The interstate highway system, interregional state principal arterials including ferry connections that serve statewide travel....(RCW 47.06.140) (emphasis added)

### **Legislative Transportation Committee (LTC)**

The Legislative Transportation Committee (LTC) is concurrently undertaking a review of the HSS as part of their work program for the fall of 2003. The HSS working group members are:

Sen. Haugen

Sen. Kastama

Sen. Horn

Sen. Swecker

Rep. Jarrett

Rep. Armstrong

Rep. Hatfield

Rep. Sullivan

The HSS working group held its first meeting on September 17. The working group discussed the definition, application, and impacts of a route being designated HSS. The working group concurred with the Commission's update approach, but asked legislative staff to formulate some suggested refinements to the existing criteria to further interpret the criteria in RCW 47.05.021(3) and RCW 47.06.140. The suggested refinements are:

**Serve statewide travel:**

1. Review HSS system in relationship to highway traffic volumes within the following geographic groups:
  - a. Urban and rural areas within King, Pierce, and Snohomish Counties.
  - b. Urban and rural areas within the other 36 counties.
2. Review HSS system in relationship to statewide travel patterns identified in the following transportation groupings:
  - a. Strategic Freight System designated by FMSIB (Freight and Goods System T1 & T2).
  - b. Functional Classifications (Principal Arterials).
  - c. National Highway System (NHS).
  - d. Scenic Byways.
  - e. Other transportation facilities of statewide significance.

**Connect major communities across the state:**

3. Review HSS system to determine if census-designated urbanized areas (populations greater than 50,000) are served by the HSS system.
4. Review HSS system to determine if all county seats are served by the HSS system.
5. Review HSS system to determine if all major recreational attractions within the state are served by the HSS system.

**Support the state's economy:**

6. Review HSS system to determine if major ports and airports are served by the HSS system.

**RTPO Process Concerns**

The constrained time frame for the HSS update is causing concern for WSDOT, RTPOs and local jurisdictions. The schedule originally shows a two-month (September - October) period for coordination with RTPOs, but late input from the LTC has delayed this process. There is a concern that this time period is not sufficient for local jurisdictions to develop a nomination (specifically supporting documentation) and for the RTPO to fully review or make a recommendation on the nomination.

There are also concerns that the HSS criteria are not specific enough in regards to defining “interregional,” “major communities across the state,” and “support the state’s economy.”

Given the time constraint and criteria concerns, some RTPOs may decide to simply act as a conduit for transmitting nominations to the Commission rather than reviewing the nominations and making a regional recommendation.

## **DISCUSSION:**

1. Staff is currently developing data and analysis to address the LTC working group's refinements to the HSS criteria. Staff will provide the Commission and LTC working group with analysis utilizing the refined criteria.
2. RTPO schedule concerns regarding the limited time allowed to develop and review nominations are valid. The RTPO meeting schedules may not allow local jurisdictions enough time to prepare sufficient documentation nor the RTPO sufficient time to review nominations.

## **RECOMMENDATION:**

1. It is recommended that the Commission adjust the HSS update schedule slightly to allow RTPOs to submit nominations for additions or deletions up to December 1, 2003. This will minimize the amount of time WSDOT has to analyze the proposed changes, but WSDOT will work closely with the RTPOs as the nominations are being developed to provide some of the analysis concurrently with the RTPO work. The recommended schedule is:
  1. October and November 2003: RTPOs prepare nominations. Applicants will be required to provide data and analysis to support their nomination. WSDOT will assist RTPOs in preparing HSS nominations.
  2. December 1, 2003: Nominations are submitted to WSDOT.
  3. December 1-15, 2003: WSDOT regional and headquarters staff will review the nominations and prepare a recommendation for the Commission.
  4. December 17, 2003: Commission reviews nominations, WSDOT Staff analysis and recommendations.
  5. January 2004: The Commission adopts proposed changes (if any) and submits adopted changes to the Legislature.
2. Because of RTPO meeting schedules, it is also recommended that the Commission allow the flexibility for local jurisdictions to submit nominations directly to WSDOT provided that the local jurisdiction has coordinated the action with the RTPO and the RTPO does not object.
3. Include the suggested LTC criteria refinements in communications with RTPOs regarding the nomination process, and in WSDOT staff analysis that will be reported back to the Commission with WSDOT recommendations.

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